

What is a Paragraph?

What is a paragraph? You probably know that a paragraph is a group of sentences and that the first sentence of this group is indented; that is, it begins a little bit more to the right of the margin than the rest of the sentences in this group. But it is not enough to say that a paragraph is a group of sentences. How do these sentences relate to each other? How does a paragraph begin and where does it end? What constitutes a good paragraph? These are the questions we answer in this first unit.

The Topic of a Paragraph

To begin with, a *paragraph* is defined as a group of sentences that develops one main idea; in other words, a paragraph develops a topic. A *topic* is the subject of the paragraph; it is what the paragraph is about. Read the following paragraph, which is *about* the habit of smoking cigarettes.

Smoking cigarettes can be an expensive habit. Considering that the average price per pack of cigarettes is about \$2.50, people who smoke two packs of cigarettes a day spend \$5 per day on their habit. At the end of one year, these smokers have spent at least \$1,825.00. But the price of cigarettes is not the only expense cigarette smokers incur. Since cigarette smoke has an offensive odor that permeates clothing, stuffed furniture, and carpeting, smokers often find that these items must be cleaned more frequently than those of nonsmokers. Although it is difficult to estimate the cost of this additional expense, one can see that this hidden expense does contribute to making smoking an expensive habit.

EXERCISE 2.1 Study the following paragraphs to find their topics. Write the topic for each paragraph in the space provided.

1. A final examination in a course will give a student the initiative to do his or her best work throughout the course. Students who are only taking notes and attending classes in order to pass a few short tests will not put forth their best effort. For instance, some of my friends in drama, in which there is no final examination, take poor notes, which they throw away after each short test. Skipping classes also becomes popular. Imagine the incredible change a final examination would produce. Students would have to take good notes and attend all classes in order to be prepared for the final examination.

—Suzanne Gremillion

This paragraph is about _____.

2. Another reason why I like the beach is its solitary atmosphere. At the beach, I have no witness but the beach, and I can speak and think with pleasure. No one can interrupt me, and the beach will always be there to listen to everything I want to say. In addition, it is a quiet place to go to meditate. Meditation requires solitude. Many times when I am confused about something, I go to the beach by myself and find that this is the best place to resolve my conflicts, solve problems, and think.

—M. Veronica Porta

This paragraph is about _____.

3. Weird stuff seems to go with major comets. When a comet appeared in A.D. 60, the people of Rome assumed it meant the impending death of their still new emperor, Nero. He responded by exiling a potential rival. When another comet turned up just four years later, ancient historians say he ordered the execution of dozens of nobles. It is said that Moctezuma II saw a comet in 1517 that foreshadowed the downfall of the Aztec empire. In 1910, a wave of hysteria swept over the United States amid reports that Earth was about to pass through Halley's tail.

—William R. Newcott, "The Age of Comets."

National Geographic, 192: 6 December 1997. p. 105.

This paragraph is about _____.

4. When we make attributions about ourselves or about others, we tend to attribute the behavior in question to either *internal* or *external* forces. When you see someone crash his car into a telephone pole, you can attribute that unfortunate piece of behavior either to internal or external causes. You might conclude that the person is a terrible driver or emotionally upset (internal causes), or you might conclude that another car forced the driver off the road (external cause). If you fail an exam, you can attribute it to internal causes such as stupidity or a failure to study, or you can attribute it to external causes such as an unfair test or an overheated room.

—John P. Houston, *Motivation* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), p. 255.

This paragraph is about _____.

Prewriting: Planning

Although sometimes you are assigned topics to write about, often these topics are too general to be developed adequately in one paragraph. Therefore, you will need to *restrict* your topic: that is, you will need to narrow down your topic to a more specific one. Suppose, for example, that you are asked to write about your favorite place, and you choose a country such as Mexico. Although you

could easily write several sentences naming all the things you like about Mexico, it would be more interesting for your reader if you narrowed down the topic *Mexico* to a particular place in Mexico, such as the Great Temple in the Aztec ruins. Your topic should be narrowed down as much as possible. Look at how the topic *Mexico* is narrowed here:

M E X I C O

MEXICO CITY

Historical Sites

Aztec Ruins

The Great
Temple

Of course, there are many other ways to narrow the same topic. For example:

M E X I C O

YUCATAN PENINSULA

The City of Progreso

The Beach
South of
Progreso

Now let us suppose that you are asked to write a paragraph about drugs. Obviously, the topic *drugs* is far too broad for specific development in one paragraph; the topic needs to be narrowed down, or restricted. Observe here how the topic *drugs* can be restricted:

D R U G S

Marijuana

Effects of Smoking
MarijuanaEffect on
Memory

This paragraph, then, will discuss *one* of the effects of smoking marijuana: memory loss. Like most topics, this one can be narrowed down in several ways. Observe:

M A R I J U A N A

Reasons People
Smoke ItPeer Pressure
As a Reason

This paragraph will discuss one of the reasons people smoke marijuana: peer pressure.

EXERCISE 2-2 Fill in each line that follows by narrowing down the topics given. For the last one, select your own topic, and then narrow it down.

1. _____ Cigarettes
 _____ Effects of Smoking Cigarettes
 _____ Effects on Health
 _____ Effects on Lungs
2. _____ Cigarettes
 _____ Cigarette Smokers

- Types of Cigarette Smokers
-
-
3. Technology
-
- Computers
-
- Three Uses of Computers
-
-
4. Fatal Diseases
-
- Cancer
-
-
-
5. My Hometown
-
-
-
-
- 6.
-
-
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The Topic Sentence

The topic of a paragraph is usually introduced in a sentence; this sentence is called the *topic sentence*. However, the topic sentence can do more than introduce the subject of the paragraph. A good topic sentence also serves to state an idea or an attitude about the topic. This idea or attitude about the topic is called the *controlling idea*; it controls what the sentences in the paragraph will discuss. All sentences in the paragraph should relate to and develop the controlling idea. To illustrate, let us look at the following topic sentence to identify the topic and the controlling idea:

Smoking cigarettes can be an expensive habit.

In this sentence, the topic is the *habit of smoking cigarettes*; the controlling idea is that smoking can be *expensive*. A paragraph that develops this topic sentence should demonstrate that smoking cigarettes can indeed be an expensive habit. Reread the paragraph on page 13 and see if it develops the idea of *expensive*.

Of course, there are many other controlling ideas one could have about the topic of smoking cigarettes. Indeed, one of the most popular is that smoking is hazardous to health. See how this idea is developed in the following paragraph:



Smoking cigarettes is hazardous to your health. Several years ago, a United States government study was released that linked the intake of tar and nicotine, found in cigarettes, with the development of cancer in laboratory animals. The evidence was so overwhelming that the United States government required cigarette manufacturers to put a warning on the outside of each package of cigarettes which says, "Warning: The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is hazardous to your health." Aside from the most serious and dreaded disease, cancer, cigarette smoking also can aggravate or promote other health problems. For example, smoking can increase the discomfort for people with asthma and emphysema. It can give one a "smoker's cough" and contribute to bronchitis. Finally, recent studies have shown that cigarette smokers are more susceptible to

common colds and flu. Whether you get an insignificant cold or the major killer, cancer, smoking cigarettes is hazardous. Is it worth it?

EXERCISE 2-3 Study the topic sentences that follow. Circle the controlling idea and underline the topic in each sentence. Note: The controlling idea and the topic may be expressed in more than one word. The first one is done for you.

1. Another way to reduce the rate of inflation is to balance the federal budget.
2. A final advantage Martina Navratilova had on the court was her constant aggressiveness.
3. A properly planned science fiction course should include a unit on political implications.
4. Einstein's unsuccessful attempt to get nuclear weapons banned^o was disappointing to him.
5. One of the biggest problems with athletic scholarships is that more attention is paid to sports than to education.
6. Some seeming English-Spanish equivalents are deceptive^o.
7. Another reason air pollution is hazardous^o is that it damages the earth's ozone layer.
8. Savings bonds are also a safe investment.
9. Although bright, Maria is a very shy girl.
10. Another problem for students is finding a part-time job.

made illegal

misleading

dangerous

Improving the Topic Sentence

As indicated, a topic sentence introduces the topic and the controlling idea about that topic. However, it is not enough merely to have a topic and a controlling idea. The controlling idea should be clear and focused on a particular aspect. For example, consider the following topic sentence:

Drinking coffee is bad.

This sentence has a topic—*drinking coffee*—and a controlling idea—*bad*—but they are vague. In what way is coffee bad? For whom or what is it bad? Is drinking only a little coffee bad, or is drinking a lot of coffee bad? As you can see, this topic sentence leaves a lot of questions that probably cannot be answered effectively in one paragraph. The sentence needs more focus, and that focus can come from the controlling idea:

Drinking over four cups of coffee a day can be harmful to pregnant women.

In this version, the topic itself is narrowed down some more, and the controlling idea is more precise.

EXERCISE 2-4 Study the following groups of sentences. Circle the number of the better topic sentence in each pair. The first one is done for you.

1. There are many things that make learning the English language difficult.
- ②. What makes English particularly difficult to learn is pronunciation.
3. Enrolling in college is not an easy task
4. Registration at State College is a painful process.
5. *Gone with the Wind* may be an old movie, but it is still a good movie.
6. The acting in *Gone with the Wind* was superb.
7. The wide variety of merchandise makes Sears convenient.
8. The home repair department in Sears is convenient.
9. The architecture in Chicago reflects trends in modern design.
10. Chicago is an interesting city because of its history, architecture, and sports activities.

EXERCISE 2-5 Read the following weak topic sentences. Rewrite each one to make it more specific. You can narrow down the topic and/or the controlling idea. The first one is done for you.

1. The Honda Civic is an excellent automobile.

The Honda Civic is economical to maintain.

2. My hometown is a wonderful place.

3. Many improvements are needed at this school.

4. Exercise is good for you.

5. Driving a car can be hazardous.

6. Computers are useful.
-

7. There are many interesting things to do at the park.
-

8. Watching television is bad for you.
-

Recognizing the Topic Sentence

A topic sentence, then, serves to introduce the topic and the controlling idea. But where should the topic sentence be placed in the paragraph? Generally, because the topic sentence does introduce, it is a good idea to place it at or near the beginning of the paragraph. However, depending on the kind of paragraph it is in, the topic sentence may be placed near the middle or even at the end of the paragraph. Sometimes neither the topic nor the controlling idea is explicitly stated in one sentence; this does not mean, however, that a topic and controlling idea are not present. In this kind of paragraph, the topic and controlling idea are implied; that is, they are clearly suggested in the development of the paragraph. However, it is usually a good idea to state topic sentences clearly, not only to be certain that the idea is clear but also to help control the development of the paragraph.

EXERCISE 2-6 Study the following paragraphs. In the space provided, write out the topic sentence for each paragraph, underlining the topic and circling the controlling idea. If the topic sentence is implied, write one out.

1. Another interesting area of research has to do with the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. We are intrinsically motivated when we do something “for the fun of it,” or for no other reason than to perform the behavior. We sing in the shower, not because we expect applause or because we are trying to earn money, but merely because we like to do it. We do crossword puzzles, paint pictures, and look at the sunset because it is intrinsically rewarding to do so. We don’t expect any external reward. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to situations in which we do act because we expect some external reward. We may only show up at the office because we need the money. We may only go to school to please our parents. We may be exceptionally polite to a particular individual because we want something from her.

—John P. Houston, *Motivation* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), p. 268.

Topic Sentence: _____

2. In 1944, the United States signed a treaty with Mexico guaranteeing that country 1.5 million acre-feet of Colorado River water a year. But the big division of the Colorado's precious water had occurred in 1922 under the Colorado River Compact, signed by the seven states along the river and the federal government. What makes the agreement shaky—some describe it as “a house of cards”—is that it is based on an overly optimistic estimate of the river's average flow. About 15 million acre-feet of water were originally apportioned to the states; actually, the average annual supply is only 13.8 million. In addition, the Compact did not take into account Mexico's right to any Colorado River water at all, so the 1.5 million acre-feet later guaranteed to Mexico widen the gap between demand and supply. The Colorado is, in short, overbooked.

—Adapted from David Sheridan, “The Colorado: An Engineering Wonder Without Enough Water.” *Smithsonian* 13 (February 1983): pp. 46–47.

Topic Sentence: _____

3. Tigers are generally believed to have evolved in southern China more than a million years ago and then to have prowled westward toward the Caspian Sea, north to the snow-filled evergreen and oak forest of Siberia, and south across Indochina and Indonesia, all the way to lush tropical forest of Bali. Their modern history is admittedly dispiriting. Into the 1940s, eight supposed subspecies persisted in the wild. Since then, however the tigers of Bali, the Caspian region, and Java have vanished, and the South China tiger, hunted as vermin during the regime of Mao Zedong, seems poised to follow them into extinction; fewer than 30 individuals may now survive outside zoos, scattered among four disconnected patches of mountain forest, probably too few and far between to maintain a viable population ever again.

—Geoffrey C. Ward, “Making Room for Wild Tigers.”
National Geographic 192 (December 1997): p. 13.

Topic Sentence: _____

4. Anyone who saw him once never forgot his nose and his body. The first time anyone saw him, they were very surprised. The second time, they looked at his nose with admiration, as if it were a valuable treasure. His nose, which was longer than Barbra Streisand's, occupied most of his face. When he smiled, nothing but his nose was visible. He was recognized by it even in a

crowd. The treasure made one think that in his previous life he had been a collie or an anteater. In addition, his nose was as thin as a razor. If he had flown like a jet, he could have divided the clouds. His body was also very skinny. He looked as if he had not eaten for ten days. He was a heavy eater, but one couldn't imagine where he kept food in his body. Finally, on a windy day, he was blown away and gone, like Mary Poppins.

—Nobutaka Matsuo

Topic Sentence: _____

5. We write because we want to understand our lives. This is why my closets are filled with boxes and boxes of musty old journals. It is why I found pages of poetry under my stepdaughter Kira's mattress when she went off to camp. It is why my father tells me he will soon begin his memoirs. As John Cheever explains, "When I began to write, I found this was the best way to make sense out of my life."

—Lucy McCormick Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Writing*
(Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1986), p. 3.

Topic Sentence: _____

6. Sometimes on Friday, our Sabbath day, my father would take us to the Old City, marked by the Bab el-Metwalli, or Gate of the Holy Man, named after the Sufi sheikh who reportedly sat there centuries before, performing miracles for passersby. For all that Cairo is my hometown, I never ceased to marvel at the sights and the exotic history that made up my city. The streets of the Old City, far too narrow for automobiles, were choked instead with the traffic of horses, donkeys, and even people laden down with loads of fresh vegetables, firesticks, vases of copper, and brass to be sold in the bustling Khan el-Khalili bazaar. Cairo had been the greatest trading center in the world for centuries, and it was here in the caravanseraï of the Khan el-Khalili that medieval traders from all over the Arab world had unloaded their camel trains. It was near here also that the Fatimid sultans had kept a zoo for the giraffes, ostriches, and elephants sent to them as tribute from kingdoms in Africa.

—Jehan Sadat, from "Growing Up in Cairo,"
in *Woman of Egypt* (Simon and Schuster, 1987).

Topic Sentence: _____

Formulating the Topic Sentence

Prewriting: Generating Ideas

Thus far, you have been given topics and controlling ideas to recognize and improve, but often you must find your own controlling idea. Once you have found a manageable topic for a paragraph, you need to examine that topic more closely to determine your own feelings or attitudes about it.

To decide on the controlling idea and what you want to say about a topic, begin by using one or more of the prewriting techniques for generating ideas you learned in Chapter 1. For example, suppose you are asked to write about a place in your country, and you narrow that broad topic down to a certain resort. The following is one example of a brainstorm on the topic:

Topic: Lehai Resort

Notes:

- Pretty sandy beaches, palm trees along the shore, clear turquoise water, gorgeous mountains
- Tourists swarming everywhere, new hotels cropping up every month; one hotel blocks the view of the sea from the road, many tourist shops
- Resort provides many jobs, brings in \$1 million in revenue from tourists, has attracted some new companies to the city

The list could, of course, be expanded. Once you have brainstormed your ideas, look through the list for something striking. For example, you might realize that the resort has provided economic benefits to the local area. Or, you might find that you want to write about the beauty of the resort area. Several ideas could emerge from this brainstorming session. Here are a few:

Lehai Resort is set in one of the most scenic coastal areas in the world.

Lehai Resort has been ruined by the excessive influx of tourists.

Lehai Resort has brought direct and indirect economic benefits to our area.

EXERCISE 2-7 Choose one of the following topics or one of your own and brainstorm the topic. After writing everything that comes to mind on the topic, sort through the list and choose an idea that interests you. Write a topic sentence that has a controlling idea. In the space provided, write your topic sentence, underline the topic and circle the controlling idea. If necessary, narrow the topic down further. If your teacher suggests, you may repeat this process for another one of the topics.

superstitions

pollution

an interesting custom

your major

a memorable teacher

an important decision

Support:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Unity

Each sentence within a paragraph should relate to the topic and develop the controlling idea. If any sentence does not relate to or develop that area, it is irrelevant and should be omitted from the paragraph. Consider the topic sentence discussed earlier in this chapter:

Smoking cigarettes can be an expensive habit.

If a sentence in this paragraph had discussed how annoying it is to watch someone blow smoke rings, that sentence would have been out of place, since it does not discuss the expense of smoking.

A paragraph that has sentences that do not relate to or discuss the controlling idea lacks *unity*. Note the following example of a paragraph that lacks unity:

Another problem facing a number of elderly people is living on a reduced income. Upon retiring, old people may receive a pension from their company or Social Security from the government. The amount of their monthly checks is often half the amount of the checks they received when they were employed. Suddenly, retirees find that they can no longer continue the lifestyle that they had become accustomed to, even if that lifestyle was a modest one. Many find, after paying their monthly bills, that there is no money left for a movie or a dinner out. Of course, sometimes they can't go out because of their health. Maybe they have arthritis or rheumatism and it is painful for them to move around. This can also change their lifestyle. Some older people, however, discover that the small amount of money they receive will not even cover their monthly bills. They realize with horror that electricity, a telephone, and nourishing food are luxuries they can no longer afford. They resort to shivering in the dark, eating cat food in order to make ends meet.

The topic of this paragraph is “another problem facing a number of elderly people,” and the controlling idea is “living on a reduced income.” Therefore, all of the sentences should deal with the idea of the problem of living on a reduced income. In the paragraph, though, there are three sentences that do not discuss this particular topic: “Of course, sometimes they can’t go out because of their health. Maybe they have arthritis or rheumatism and it is painful for them to move around. This can also change their lifestyle.” These sentences should be taken out of this paragraph and perhaps developed in another paragraph.

EXERCISE 2•10 Read the following paragraphs. Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph and cross out any sentences that do not belong in the paragraph. There may be one or more irrelevant sentences.

1. Since the mid-1960s, there has been a tremendous increase in the popularity and quality of Latin and South American novelists; in fact, some call this literary movement “El Boom.” Mexico has produced, for example, Carlos Fuentes, who wrote *The Death of Artemio Cruz*. The 1967 Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to the Guatemalan novelist Miguel Ángel Asturias. Argentina has given us numerous impressive writers, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Luisa Valenzuela, and Manuel Puig, whose *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was made into a film. William Hurt won the Oscar for Best Actor for his role in that movie. Another recent novelist who has impressed the world is Chile’s Isabelle Allende (*The House of the Spirits*). The list could go on, but probably the biggest name associated with this movement is Gabriel García Márquez, a Colombian whose enormously popular *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in 1967, helped him earn the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature.
2. One of the most acclaimed and beloved of Japanese animators is Hayao Miyazaki, whose *Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind* (given the more comfortable English title *Warriors of the Wind* . . .) was a hauntingly beautiful fable about ecology, the power of love, and hope. The same director made the enchanting children’s fantasy *My Neighbor Totoro*, the story of two young country girls and their encounters with forest spirits and other odd entities. Miyazaki’s evocation of an ethereal countryside, a Japan of quiet beauty that seemed to some no longer to exist, brought many an adult viewer to tears of nostalgia and regret. This surprises some people who think that animation is only for children.

—Adapted from: Lee Server, “Anime,” *Asian Pop Cinema* (1999), p. 88.

3. The most obvious problem with being unemployed is not having the money you need for daily life. Most people need money just for the necessities—paying the rent and buying food. And even though buying clothes may not be a necessity, it is still important. If you don’t have a job, who is going to give

you the money for rent and food? Maybe you have an uncle or a cousin who will let you borrow a little bit of money for a month or two, but most people can't afford to pay for other people's rent. So, if you don't have a job, you will have trouble paying the rent and buying food.

4. I would not want to live to be 500 years old if I was the only really old person, if everyone else died at the normal time. One reason is that people would always keep coming to me and asking questions about the past. They would want to know when this happened and that happened and did such-and-such really happen. They would keep bothering me. I think now sometimes old people do not like being bothered. The other reason is that it would be too sad. If everyone else died at the normal time, I would have to watch all my friends and family die. I would not want to see my children die or my grandchildren. I would be like a freak.

Coherence

We have seen that a paragraph must have a topic and controlling idea, support, and unity. Another element that a paragraph needs is *coherence*. A coherent paragraph contains sentences that are logically arranged and that flow smoothly.

Logical arrangement refers to the order of your sentences, which varies depending on your purpose. For example, if you want to describe what happens in a movie (that is, the plot), your sentences would follow the sequence of the action in the movie, from beginning to end—in that order. If, on the other hand, you want to describe the most exciting moments in the movie, you would select a few moments and decide on a logical order for discussion—perhaps presenting the least exciting moments first and the most exciting last to create suspense. (In the following chapters, we study the various principles for ordering ideas and sentences.)

A paragraph can be incoherent even when the principle for ordering the ideas is logical. Sometimes, as students are writing, they remember something that they wanted to say earlier and include it as they write. Unfortunately, this sentence often ends up out of place. Study the following paragraph, in which one or more sentences are out of order:

Although Grants Pass, Oregon, is a fairly small town, it offers much to amuse summer visitors. They can go rafting down the Rogue River. They can go swimming in the Applegate River. Lots of people go hunting for wild berries that grow along the roadsides. Campers will find lovely campgrounds that are clean. There are several nice hotels. Tourists can browse through a number of interesting shops in town, such as antique stores. One fun activity is shopping at the open market

where local folks sell produce grown in their gardens. Grants Pass has a lot of places to eat, ranging from a low-calorie dessert place to lovely restaurants. Some of these restaurants offer good food and gorgeous views. One store to visit is the shop that sells items made from Oregon's beautiful myrtlewood. Fishing in the area is also a popular activity. Water sports are by far the main attraction. As you can see, Grants Pass offers a lot to do in the summer. If you want to give your family a nice, wholesome vacation, try visiting Grants Pass.

The paragraph seems to have a principle of organization: The first half is devoted to activities in the areas just outside of the city itself, and the last half discusses activities within the city. However, toward the end of the paragraph, the writer seems to throw in a few sentences as an afterthought. Three sentences—"One store to visit is the shop that sells items made from Oregon's beautiful myrtlewood," "Fishing in the area is also a popular activity," and "Water sports are by far the main attraction"—are out of place. This paragraph could be revised as follows:

Although Grants Pass, Oregon, is a fairly small town, it offers much to amuse summer visitors. Water sports are by far the main attraction. Visitors can go rafting down the Rogue River. They can go swimming in the Applegate River. Fishing in the area is a popular activity. Lots of people go hunting for wild berries that grow along the roadsides. Campers will find lovely campgrounds that are clean. There are several nice hotels. Tourists can browse through a number of interesting shops in town, such as antique stores. One store to visit is the shop that sells items made from Oregon's beautiful myrtlewood. One fun activity is shopping at the open market where local folks sell produce grown in their gardens. Grants Pass has a lot of places to eat, ranging from a low-calorie dessert place to lovely restaurants. Some of these restaurants offer good food and gorgeous views. As you can see, Grants Pass offers a lot to do in the summer. If you want to give your family a nice, wholesome vacation, try visiting Grants Pass.

The order of the sentences in this revised version is improved, but it is still not completely coherent, for the sentences do not always flow smoothly.

Smooth flow refers to how well one idea or sentence leads into another. Smooth flow can be achieved through sentence combining and through the use of certain expressions, called transitions, that provide the links between ideas. Some transitional expressions include *for example*, *to begin with*, *in contrast*, *however*, *also*, among many others that we will cover throughout this text. Note

how the addition of some expressions and the combining of some sentences improve the coherence of this paragraph:

Although Grants Pass, Oregon, is a fairly small town, it offers much to amuse summer visitors. Water sports are by far the main attraction. Visitors can go rafting down the Rogue River or swimming in the Applegate River. Fishing in the area is *another* popular activity. Lots of people also go hunting for wild berries that grow along the road-sides. *In addition*, there are lovely, clean campgrounds where campers can park their vehicles. *For those who prefer to stay in town*, Grants Pass offers several nice hotels. In town, tourists can browse through a number of interesting shops, such as antique stores and the shop that sells items made from Oregon's beautiful myrtlewood. *Another* fun activity is shopping at the open market where local folks sell produce grown in their gardens. *And finally*, Grants Pass has a lot of places to eat, ranging from a low-calorie dessert place to lovely restaurants, some of which offer good food and gorgeous views. As you can see, Grants Pass offers a lot to do in the summer. If you want to give your family a nice, wholesome vacation, try visiting this charming town.

The expressions *another*, *also*, *in addition*, and *finally* bridge the gaps in ideas. Some of the sentences have been combined as well. Combining sentences and adding transitions make the ideas and sentences easier to follow.

If the sentences are not logically arranged or if they do not connect with each other smoothly, the paragraph is *incoherent*. Coherence is an important quality of writing.

EXERCISE 2•11 Study each of the following paragraphs, in which one or more sentences are out of order. Revise these paragraphs for greater coherence by arranging the sentences in logical order.

1. In the hotel business, computers ease the load at the front desk. With a computer, a clerk can make a reservation easily and quickly, without the use of cards, racks, or registration books. So when guests come in to register, their reservations can be checked, and they can be given available rooms without much fuss or bother. The hotel business is just one type of enterprise that has profited by the invention of computers. And with a computer, the clerk can get an instant update of the room status. This tells the clerk which rooms are available to guests.
2. Political conventions in America attract all kinds of people besides delegates. You are sure to see an artist or two doing chalk portraits of the

people who want
abortion to be illegal
people who want
abortion to be legal

ridiculous, incredible

candidates on the sidewalks. Groups who wish to attract attention to their political and social causes demonstrate outside the convention halls. The pro-life people,^o the pro-choice people,^o the supporters of nuclear energy, those against nuclear energy, and the pro-gays and anti-gays are probably the most common groups. Others just like to poke fun at the candidates. For instance, at most conventions you will find at least a couple of people wearing masks of their favorite or least favorite candidates. Others dress in costumes and carry signs with outrageous^o comments about the candidates or the political process. Another social-political group is the one advocating more civil rights and better economic opportunities for minorities. No matter who they are or what their reasons are for going to the conventions, these people always add color to the sometimes boring conventions.

3. An example of this kind of prejudice happened to me when I was in the fourth grade. I remember one time when all the students were being allowed to choose a book they wanted to read. When it was my turn to choose a book, she laughed at me and said, "Oh, that one is too hard for you. I'll choose one for you." I was so embarrassed. I thought that she should not embarrass me in front of the class like that. My teacher treated me as if I was about two grade levels below my classmates. My family had just moved here from California, and she did not think I was up with the rest of my class.

EXERCISE 2•12 Study the following paragraphs, which lack both unity and coherence. For each paragraph, rearrange the sentences for coherence and omit any sentences that do not belong.

1. First of all, teenagers work for their own current expenses. For example, my cousin Celia works at a clothing store and buys all her own clothes. Last week, she bought herself a nice leather jacket. And one of my friends bought himself a used car just from the money he made after school. Young people want to make money for their future. Young people want to buy clothes, and they want to save money to buy a car or a stereo or a television. An example of this is saving money for an education after high school. My cousin Robert is doing this for his future. He also told me that he is saving some money to set up a household after marriage.
2. The driving lesson I got from my fiancé was a very distressing one. I started off very well until my fiancé started getting bossy. I did one wrong thing so he started shouting at me. The little incident occurred when he wanted me to make a U-turn in the middle of the street. As I was trying to do that, I turned the wheels too hard and the wheels hit the end of the curb. My fiancé started yelling at me as if he were crazy. So I calmly put the car in park and

started to get out to let him drive since I obviously wasn't doing it the way he wanted. But he grabbed my arm and told me to finish getting the car out of the middle of the street. Oh, I forgot to tell you that when the tires hit the curb, the car stopped in the middle of the street. I guess that was why he was worried. My fiancé also tried to teach me to play tennis and he shouted at me then, too. He also wanted me to move the car because there were cars coming in both directions. I decided after this incident that my fiancé was not the right person to teach me to drive.

3. The way women are shown in TV commercials today has changed compared with 20 years ago. Twenty years ago, commercials mostly showed women as brainless housewives. In those commercials, women were concerned about getting the best laundry detergents, the softest toilet paper, or the tastiest soup. They were portrayed as sort of dumb and silly, as if the most important thing in the world was getting hamburger on sale. Women in commercials today are not just housewives. They are shown as professional working people, too. For example, in one telephone commercial, a woman with a briefcase is saying goodbye to her child and husband as she is about to catch a plane. In commercials today, women are shown as housewives, but they are not portrayed as so dumb. For example, the woman in the Driscoll commercial I saw last night seemed like a normal, intelligent person. I think the same difference is true for ads in magazines.

Internet Activity: Composition Skills and the Internet



Do you need more help with topic sentences, paragraph support, unity, or coherence? There are many Online Writing Labs (OWLs) on the Internet which offer additional advice and practice with these and other composition skills. Find out if your school has an OWL. If it doesn't, do a keyword search for "online writing labs" or visit the OWL at Purdue University at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>.

EXERCISE 2-13 Writing Assignment Write a paragraph using the topic sentence and support you developed in Exercise 2-9. After you write the paragraph, consult the checklist at the end of the chapter.

EXERCISE 2-14 Assignments from the Disciplines Following are some topics which are typical of writing assignments in college-preparation or college success classes. Use one of the prewriting techniques you learned in Chapter 1 to generate ideas and support. Then, decide on a controlling idea and choose the details that will support it. Finally, write the paragraph.

1. Many students feel anxious before a test. Write a paragraph describing what students can do to combat test anxiety.
2. Choose a major or profession you have chosen or in which you are interested. Write a paragraph explaining what one skill or quality is most important for success in this major or profession.

Composition Skills



Revision

Peer Review

When you have finished writing the first draft of your paragraph, give it to a classmate to read and review. Use the peer review checklist in Appendix I to respond to each other's drafts.

Revision Checklist for the Paragraph

Use these questions to help you to give suggestions to your peers and to revise your essay.

1. Is your topic sufficiently narrowed down?
2. Does your paragraph have a topic sentence? If not, is the topic sentence implied?
3. Does your paragraph have a clear, focused controlling idea?
4. Is your paragraph unified; that is, do all of the sentences support the controlling idea?
5. Is your paragraph coherent; that is, are the sentences logically arranged and do they flow smoothly?